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### Sensibility And Speculation: Emma Hamilton

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## *Sensibility and Speculation*

EMMA HAMILTON

Betsy Bolton

In 1786, George Romney used Emma Hart as a model for a painting eventually entitled *Sensibility*. Underscoring the odd combination of nature and artifice associated with sensibility, the painting privileged feeling over context. Its background—trees, hills, and sweeping clouds—hovers between a realistic landscape and the painted backdrop for a theater; in the foreground, half kneeling on the edge of a table, the model reaches out to touch a tall but insubstantial potted plant. Both the plant and the backdrop frame and enclose nature, insisting on the artifice of its reproduction—yet the wind in the background also seems real enough to lift the scarf draped over the figure's left shoulder. The mixed artifice of the scenery is recapitulated in the self-dramatizing pose of Sensibility herself. Her left hand, extended toward the plant, has its fingers spread; the right hand is held to her bosom. Her eyes intent, her lips parted, the performer seems fully engaged in the "attitude"—sensibility—she enacts. The title and indeed the concept of the painting were apparently suggested to Romney by William Hayley, a minor poet, playwright, patron, and biographer. In his *Life of Romney*, Hayley tells the story this way:

During my visit to Romney in November, I happened to find him one morning contemplating by himself, a recently coloured head, on a small canvas. I expressed my admiration of his unfinished work in the following terms:— "This is a most happy beginning: you never painted a female head with such exquisite expression; you have only to enlarge your canvas, introduce the shrub mimosa, growing in a vase, with a hand of this figure approaching its leaves, and you may call your picture a personification of Sensibility."— "I like your suggestion, replied the painter, and will enlarge my canvas immediately." (120-21)

Hayley's account claims the sensibility of the painting as his own and goes on to tell how the painting ended up in his possession as part of a real estate deal. Of course, the attitude and "exquisite expression" that

made the painting an apt personification of Sensibility might be said to have “belonged” rather to the model, Emma Hart—yet Hart’s own status as the artistic and sexual possession of a series of men remained at issue throughout the bulk of her public career.

In many ways, Emma Hart—or Emma, Lady Hamilton, as she came to be—might be described as the Marilyn Monroe of the late eighteenth century. Both women constituted for their times a symbol of sexuality and embodied some crucial ingredient of national or cultural identity. Emma Hamilton captured the imagination of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries first by her “Attitudes,” moving but silent improvisations on the form of antique statues; next by her rise from humble birth and dubious morality to the exalted position of Lady and “ambassadress”; and finally by her unapologetic love affair with Horatio Nelson, the “Hero of the Nile.” For a society frightened by the extreme transformations of the French Revolution, Emma Hamilton held out the promise of a social advance loyal to existing structures of nobility, as well as a model of sympathetic heroism available to all. Yet to many in the upper echelons of society, Lady Hamilton’s performative persona, transgressing the boundaries of class and gender alike, seemed vulgar and excessive. That vulgarity has never limited Hamilton’s power to fascinate audiences, however. The last thirty years have produced new biographies by David Simpson and Flora Fraser, as well as Susan Sontag’s novel *The Volcano Lover*; these books replace a trio of biographies published at the turn of the century and another half-dozen published since. In 1941, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh starred as the star-crossed lovers in *That Hamilton Woman*, a film Winston Churchill watched three hundred times over the course of his life—or so Flora Fraser claims. While the film romanticizes the Hamilton-Nelson affair, the more recent British television show *Black Adder* uses Lady Hamilton as the butt of endless ribald jokes; together, the two media thus maintain the ambivalence of Emma Hamilton’s reputation while demonstrating the strength of her ongoing claim to attention.

What can we learn about Hamilton’s period—and our own investment in its history—from the figure of this cultural icon? First, her outrageous career marks the uncomfortable boundary between romance and vulgar economic interest. Demonstrating sympathetic engagement and evoking financial speculation, her much-acclaimed “sensibility” facilitated Hamilton’s rise from lower-class unwed mother to British “ambassadress.” On several levels, her career exemplifies the fall of romance into economic networks and constraints; yet it also shows the romance dream of transformation surviving that fall. Second, the success of Emma Hart’s “Attitudes” (described later) suggests the importance of “attitude” and performance in a newly entrepreneurial society. Indeed, one might argue

that the posturing and self-promotion of Horatio Nelson, the "Hero of the Nile," merely complemented Hamilton's performances. Finally, the caricatures that registered the return of Nelson and the Hamiltons to England sketch both the (gendered) limits of a belief in romance and the robust persistence of a desire for transformation. The caricatures worked to reestablish social structures and divisions, reclaiming for the spectator—and the hero Nelson—the mobility Emma Hamilton had temporarily enjoyed and exploited. Still, these caricatures retain an ambivalent respect for the heroine of a romance somehow larger than life. Emma Hamilton and her varied career fascinated and continue to fascinate because they so integrate romance and farce that not even a focus on her unabashed and transgressive appetites—or the canny exploitation of her own reputation for sensibility—seems able to destroy the dream of transformation she embodied.

#### I. SPECULATION AND DOMESTICITY

Emma's early career as artist's model and kept mistress shows perhaps most clearly the economic constraints delimiting late eighteenth-century romance narratives, as well as the overlap of speculation and sympathy that constituted sensibility. Pregnant and abandoned by her first "protector," Emma appealed to a young political hopeful named Charles Greville for aid. He undertook to support her, put her child out to foster care, worked to domesticate her somewhat unruly temper, and employed her as a model to the young artist George Romney. According to Hayley, Emma had "exquisite taste, and such expressive powers as could furnish to an historical painter an inspiring model for the various characters either delicate or sublime. . . . Her features, like the language of Shakespeare, could exhibit all the gradations of every passion with a most fascinating truth and felicity of expression" (*Life* 119). Emma's sympathy for the characters she portrayed, her emotional investment in a wide variety of roles, helped produce impressive paintings—and financial profits. For Greville, then, Emma constituted both a financial speculation (in art-work) and a figure of private property (a kept woman, a housekeeper-cum-mistress).

Economic or financial "speculation" in the sense we understand it today came into the English language during the latter part of the eighteenth century: the *Oxford English Dictionary's* first example of this meaning dates from 1774. Adam Smith described the phenomenon in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776):

The speculative merchant exercises no one regular, established, or well-known branch of business. . . . He enters into every trade, when he foresees that it is likely to be more than commonly



profitable, and he quits it when he foresees that its profits are likely to return to the level of other trades. . . . A bold adventurer may sometimes acquire a considerable fortune by two or three successful speculations; but is just as likely to lose one by two or three unsuccessful ones. (1:116)

*Speculation*, associated with the faculty of sight on the one hand and with theoretical or abstract thought on the other, must have seemed a logical term to apply to this new mode of economic acquisition. When Smith speaks of "philosophers or men of speculation, whose trade is not to do anything, but to observe everything" (1:11), he means speculation in the sense of abstract thought—but one might also say of those who speculate on the market that their trade is "not to do anything." They live on the abstractions of finance rather than on the more familiar forms of labor or trade. At the same time, early forms of speculation found one objective correlative in the form of paintings. The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s first example of the word suggestively mingles the visual and financial: Horace Walpole wrote in 1774 that "next to gaming, which subsides a little from want of materials, the predominant folly is pictures—I beg their pardon for associating them with gaming. Sir George Collbroke, a citizen, and martyr to what is called *speculation*, had his pictures sold by auction last week. A view of Nimeguen by Cuyp, not large, and which he had bought very dearly for seventy guineas, sold for two hundred and ninety!" (23:569) Walpole brings out the extent to which speculating on a commodity market almost always means gambling on public taste and often on the intersection of financial and aesthetic values. Walpole's friend Sir William Hamilton—and Sir William's nephew Charles Greville—were also "martyrs to speculation." The two men collected paintings, sculpture, "minerals" (precious and semi-precious stones), and the art of antiquity. Uncle and nephew alike supported their expanding collections by selling various pieces at a profit: speculating in artwork.

When, against his better judgment, Greville took as mistress a young woman already pregnant by another man, he was quick to put the affair on a businesslike (and speculative) footing. He asked for young Emily Lyons's considered agreement to a plan of domestic self-restraint—in a letter that oddly conflates sexual and financial extravagance. He begins by scolding her for past imprudence—"it was your duty to deserve good treatment, & it gave me great concern to see you imprudent the first time you came to G: from the country . . . [T]o prove to you that I do not accuse you falsely I only mention 5 guineas, & half a guinea for coach." Where one would expect to find a description of flirtatiousness or loose living, Greville instead offers an example of extravagant spending—

which may in turn stand in for a more sexual transgression. After this opening scold, he explains, "if you mean to have my protection I must first know from you that you are clear of every connexion, & that you will never take them again without my consent. . . . [I]f you do not forfeit my esteem perhaps my Emily may be happy" (Morrison 1:126). Happiness and protection are the rewards of restraint, but the threat of forfeiture remains ever present.

Greville reined in Emma's inclinations toward financial extravagance by putting her in charge of a stringent housekeeping budget: "Emma Hart's Day Books" of domestic accounts offered such a pretty performance of domesticity-in-training that they were preserved years later by both Greville and Hamilton (Sichel 58). At the same time, Greville tried to turn a profit on his new acquisition by having his mistress serve as model to the up-and-coming young painter George Romney: the artist recorded over three hundred sittings between 1782 and 1786. Emma's education under Greville's direction thus followed two contradictory trends: on the one hand, she was asked to conform to a model of stable, reserved, domestic femininity. At the same time, however, she was also asked to be a changeling, to transform herself into a vengeful Medea, a powerful Circe, an abandoned Ariadne.

These two separate models of performance intersected most vividly as Romney used Emma to illustrate William Hayley's *The Triumphs of Temper*. Written in six cantos and explicitly modeled on Pope's "Rape of the Lock," Hayley's mock-heroic lady's epic presented a kind of conduct book in verse. The poem used allegorical extravagance to promote domestic self-restraint: cantos alternate between allegorical dream sequences and more "realistic" episodes demonstrating the need for feminine self-control. While the mock epic promises to reward good behavior with domestic bliss, however, the heroine's marriage opportunities are repeatedly linked to the possibility of her attendance at a masquerade—and the masquerade is loosely equated in turn with the mutability of the female character or condition:

She's everything by starts and nothing long,  
But in the space of one revolving hour  
Flies thro' all states of poverty and power,  
All forms on whom her veering mind can pitch,  
Sultana, Gipsy, Goddess, nymph, and witch.  
At length, her soul with Shakespeare's magic fraught,  
The wand of Ariel fixed her roving thought. (Hayley, *Triumphs* I)

The heroine Serena's roving thoughts about the masquerade, flying through "all states of poverty and power," suggest a certain savvy about the marriage market, a grasp of how speculative her own financial situa-

tion might be. Yet the poem disavows this speculative wisdom: the allegorical cantos work to domesticate the mobility of masquerade costumes by using the trappings of costume and spectacle to preach the virtues of domestic self-restraint.

Hayley's *Triumphs of Temper* was popular with a substantial female audience—which suggests that the tension between domestic self-restraint and the necessary mobility of financial and marital speculation was on some level familiar. Certainly Emma Hart, Lady Hamilton-to-be, took this fable very much to heart. Years later, she would write Romney to “tell Hayly I am always reading his *Triumphs of Temper*; it was that that made me Lady H., for God knows I had for five years enough to try my temper, and I am affraid if it had not been for the good example Serena taught me, my girdle wou’d have burst, and if it had I had been undone; for Sir W[illiam] minds more temper than beauty. He therefore wishes Mr. Hayly wou’d come, that he might thank him for his sweet-tempered wife” (Morrison 1:199). Hart had a temper that she worked hard to control, especially in these early years: she learned to bow to Greville’s authority with good grace, as he clearly held all the cards—yet she seems to have learned allegorical extravagance as well as domestic self-restraint from Hayley’s poem. When, as a long-awaited treat, Greville took her to Ranelagh Gardens, Hart was carried away by the favorable attention she was receiving: she burst into song and gave an impromptu performance. The spectators were delighted, Greville furious. Upon their return home, Hart used emblematic display to show that she had taken Greville’s point. She dressed herself either in “a plain cottage dress” or, according to John Romney, in the uniform of a lady’s maid and tearfully begged Greville to take her in this fashion or to abandon her forever (Sichel 60; Romney 183).

Greville’s attempts to improve his mistress opposed the demands of reserved domesticity to those of financial and artistic speculation, but these two modes of educating Hart remained largely inextricable. Exploiting her beauty and self-dramatizing sensibility in his business arrangement with Romney, Greville also domesticated and thus limited the availability of his newly acquired commodity by asking Hart to “live retired.” Greville’s next move further exposes the artificiality of any distinction between domesticity and speculation: he began to market his mistress to his uncle both as a domestic convenience and as a piece of “modern virtue” (Morrison 1:136). The young entrepreneur had decided he would do better economically through marriage to an heiress and would advance faster in his political career were he either married or single rather than tied to an obscure mistress. Enacting quite literally the traffic in women, Greville presented Hart to his uncle, Sir William Hamil-

ton, as a ready-made mistress, better than a wife for Hamilton's needs. He suggested that Hart's sensibility made her both malleable and flexible: "She is naturally elegant, & fits herself easily to any situation, having quickness & sensibility" (Morrison 1:134). And in a letter to Sir William dated 5 May 1785 Greville articulated the economic terms of exchange he desired, invoking only the dim subterfuge of third-person reportage:

Your brother spoke openly to me, that he thought the wisest thing you could do would be to buy Love ready made, & that it was not from any interested wish, as he was perfectly satisfied with the fortune he had, that it was enough for his family, & that he should be very glad to hear you declare openly your successor, & particularly so if you named me; I write without affectation or disguise. (Morrison 1:137)

In the person of Hart, Greville had "Love ready made" conveniently and inexpensively for sale: he asked only that he be declared Sir William's heir. Greville presented Hart primarily as a model of domestic comfort and convenience—yet in his sales pitch, even her domesticity seems a performance not unlike her modeling sessions with Romney:

She has avoided every appearance of giddiness, & prides herself on the neatness of her person & the good order of her house; these are habits both comfortable & convenient to me. She has vanity & likes admiration; but she connects it so much with her desire of appearing prudent, that she is much more pleas'd with accidental admiration than that of crowds which now distress her. (Morrison 1:137)

Hart's desire for admiration had been harnessed to a performance of controlled domesticity (the neatness of her person and the good order of her house). If giddiness had not in fact been replaced by prudence, her *appearance* of giddiness had given way to a desire to *appear* prudent. Greville's language emphasizes the element of spectacle, of illusory seeming, at work in Hart's performance of feminine virtue. The virtues of sexual restraint and domesticity appear practically indistinguishable from Hart's status as modern "virtu," a work of art or a theatrical performer.

In hawking "Love ready made," Greville continued to invoke the ideas of value, profit, and economic interest as he outlined Hart's virtues and personal appeal. On 3 December he wrote:

She likes admiration, but merely that she may be valued, & not to profit by raising her price. I am sure there is not a more disinterested woman in the world, if she has a new gown or hat, &c. . . . [A]s I consider you as my heir-apparent I must add that she is the

only woman I ever slept with without having ever had any of my senses offended, & a cleaner, sweeter bedfellow does not exist. (Morrison 1:142)

The uninterested lover highlights Hart's "disinterestedness" at almost the same moment his pimping becomes unmistakable. In context, "disinterested" clearly means inexpensive, easily bought: rather than demanding marriage, Hart would settle for a new dress. Wishing to be declared Sir William's "heir-apparent," Greville declares his uncle his own heir apparent in Hart's favors.

Hart's recognition of her economic vulnerability, her lack of security, developed only belatedly. In the spring of 1786, Greville sent Hart off to Sir William under false pretenses, suggesting to his uncle that Hart had accepted his protection and telling Hart he would come to get her in a few months' time. Sir William was left to break the news of the exchange. Hart responded in a series of letters to Greville, first by negating the exchange as she understood it: "I belong to you, Greville, and to you only I will belong, and nobody shall be your heir apearant" (Morrison 1:150). Hart's direct echo of Greville's proposal ("I consider you as my heir-apparent") suggests Sir William showed her the letters, laid bare the terms of exchange. Certainly Hart went on to articulate clearly and logically the economic insecurity the deal represented for her:

I am poor, helpless and forlorn. I have lived with you 5 years, and you have sent me to a strange place, and no one prospect, but thinking you was coming to me. Instead of which, I was told I was to live, you know how, with Sir William. No, I respect him, but no never. Shall he peraps live with me for a little wile like you, and send me to England. Then what am I to do? What is to become of me? (Morrison 1:152)

The proposed exchange made clear to Hart her own status as object and the cost of her willing subordination to men. Her struggle to submit to Greville's terms had brought no long-term benefits; it merely deprived her of the power to chart her own course.

Greville responded only in August, evidently advising her to make the best of her situation and take Hamilton as a lover. Hart's retort offers a verbal, emotional prefiguration of the shifting "Attitudes" that would make her famous. Her letter begins by reiterating once again the extremity of her romantic passion and domestic submission: "I have received your letter, my dearest Greville, at last, and you don't know how happy I am at hearing from you, however I may like some parts of your letter. . . . But I submit to what God and Greville pleases." Submission rapidly gave way to economic bargaining, accompanied by a careful articulation



of the value offered: "Onely consider, when I offer to live with you on the hundred a-year Sir William will give me, what you desire. And this from a girl that a King, &c., is sighing for!" Hart here translates the admiration of men like the King of Naples into a claim for her own intrinsic value—as she managed to translate Sir William's admiration into the more concrete offer of "a hundred a-year." Telling Greville to consider what he desires, Hart offers him the opportunity to satisfy his sexual desires without cost. This offer is limited to him only, she insists, as she moves into a performance of the virtuous woman insulted:

As to what you write me, to oblige Sir William, I will not answer you. For oh, if you knew what pain I feel in reading those lines where you advise me to W[hore]. . . . Nothing can express my rage! I am all madness! Greville to advise me!—You, that used to envy my smiles! Now with cool indifference to advise me to go to bed to him, Sir Wm! Oh! that is the worst of all. But I will not, no, I will not rage. If I was with you I wou'd murder you and myself booth. . . . [N]othing shall ever do for me but going home to you. If that is not to be, I will except of nothing I will go to London, their go into every excess of vice till I dye, a miserable, broken-hearted wretch, and leave my fate as a warning to young whomen never to be two good; for now you have made me love you, you made me good, you have abandoned me; and some violent end shall finish our connexion, if it is to finish.

Having painted the dire consequences of abandoning her, she returns to the language of romantic love, arguing that those consequences need not apply:

But oh! Greville, you cannot, you must not give me up. You have not the heart to do it. You love me I am sure; and I am willing to do everything in my power, and what will you have more? And I only say this is the last time I will either beg or pray, do as you like.

Moving through "attitudes" of romantic passion and domestic submission, economic bargaining, an assertion of her own value to others and to herself, threats for the future, and a final entreaty, Hart pulls out all the emotional stops in the course of the letter. Her most potent threat, however, appears in the postscript: "Pray write for nothing will make me so angry [as silence]. . . . If you affront me, I will make him marry me.—God bless you for ever" (Morrison MS. 153, 1 August 1786). In this virtuoso display of emotional versatility, Hart bases her appeal to Greville most strongly on the fact of her newly created financial value, on the economic independence Sir William's generosity provided—and on the potential damage she could do to Greville's hopes of his uncle's fortune. Her

apprenticeship with Greville left Hart with a finely tuned if somewhat belated sense of the relationship between speculation and domestic femininity—as well as a grasp of how that relationship might be managed to her benefit.

## 2. DEVELOPING AN ATTITUDE

At this stage in her career, Emma Hart was nothing if not a realist. By 26 December 1786, her affections seem to have been fully transplanted (Morrison 1:157), and Greville's speculation in portraits had begun to give way to new combinations of entrepreneurship and art. Hart's letters to Sir William during a separation that lasted through the middle of January already contain the seeds of what would come to be known as "Emma Hart's Attitudes." On 10 January, Hart described another woman's praise of her own beauty: "We may read your heart in your countenance, your complexion, in short, your figure and features is rare, for you are like the marble statues I saw, when I was in the world.' I think she flattered me up, but I was pleased" (Morrison 1:160). And on 18 January, Hart recorded the response of a male admirer who claimed

I frightened him with a Majesty and Juno look that I received him with. Then he says that whent of on being more acquainted, and I enchanted him by my politeness and the maner in which I did the honors, and then I made him allmost cry with Handels; and with the comick he could not contain himself, for he says he never saw the tragick and comick muse blended so happily together. He says Garrick would have been delighted with me. (Morrison 1:163)

Within this brief period of eight days, Hart's letters to Sir William, apparently unprompted, present her both as a marble statue and as a marvellous combination of comedy and tragedy. Hart's "Attitudes," often described as the art of bringing antique statues to life, were consistently attributed to Sir William's ingenuity and interests—or to Romney's coaching (see Hölmstrum). Yet these letters suggest that Hart herself at least planted the idea of bringing together her statuesque beauty with her emotional versatility.

In the eighteenth century, *attitude* referred either to the disposition of a figure in statuary, painting, drama, or dancing; or to "a posture of the body proper to, or implying, some action or mental state" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). "Attitudes" thus mediated between body and mind, between passion and expression. Emma Hart's "Attitudes" presented a series of mute tableaux, each of which characterized a different figure from antiquity and (perhaps more importantly) a different passion. Dressed in simple "Greek" garb, Hart used a shawl to define each character and to mark the transition from one scene or attitude to the next.



Hart's "Attitudes" seem to have worked through a thematics of animation, a dialectic between statuesque fixity and graceful motion: while visual records of these Attitudes, like those of Frederick Rehberg, necessarily show Hart frozen in position, in practice observers were taken by her graceful and striking movements. Perhaps the most famous (and earliest) description of Hart's Attitudes is that recorded by Goethe on 16 March 1787:

The spectator . . . sees what thousands of artists would have liked to express realized before him in movements and surprising transformations—standing, kneeling, sitting, reclining, serious, sad, playful, ecstatic, contrite, alluring, threatening, anxious, one pose follows another without a break. She knows how to arrange the folds of her veil to match each mood, and has a hundred ways of turning it into a head-dress. . . . [A]s a performance it's like nothing you ever saw before in your life. (199–200)

Goethe's list begins with postures and ends with passions; his account also emphasizes the limited materials from which Hart produced her representations. Hart's Attitudes were striking in part because of these material constraints: the performer seemed able to abstract an entire character and situation into a gesture, the fold of a shawl. At the same time, however, each gesture was overcharged with emotional connotations, with passion. The resulting Attitudes produced an aesthetic oddly combining excess and restraint—even as Hart's earlier career as artist's model and kept woman emphasized the paradox of an idealized femininity composed of allegorical extravagance and domestic restraint.

Her semipublic performances framed Hart's own position in society through a similar combination of mobility and constraint. Conducted in Sir William's private house, for the pleasure of himself and his friends, Hart's Attitudes also drew attention to her role as a "public woman," a mistress and model rather than a wife. Yet they remained amateur performances, the work of a dilettante rather than a professional actress—and the preservation of amateur status kept alive the ambiguity of Emma's social status. Accounts of the Attitudes highlight the role of social context in their success. The Comtesse de Boigne, for instance, described one typical Neapolitan scenario in which she as a child acted with Hart:

She grabbed me by the hair with a movement so brusque that I came back to myself in surprise and even a little fear, which made me enter into the spirit of my role—for she brandished a poignard. The passionate applause of the artist-spectators made themselves heard with exclamations of: Bravo la Medea! Then pulling me

toward her, she hugged me to her breast with the air of disputing against the fury of heaven for me, she tore from the same voices the cry of: Viva la Niobe! (53)

This account of the Attitudes as a kind of high-toned intellectual game of charades marks the outer limits of Hart's stage performances. Her Attitudes were consistently applauded by upper-class audiences, apparently for creating a group experience of sympathy, a temporary community of shared passion—but the passionate and vociferous applause of the artist-spectators remained as important as Hart's own portrayal of passion. As long as she remained silent, verbally absent from the scene, the actress could be accepted by the spectators around her. Outdoing the art of portraiture, she could move, bringing statues to life, but she could not speak without destroying the illusion. Lady Holland recorded one such break in the performance: "Just as she was lying down, with her head reclining upon an Etruscan vase to represent a water-nymph, she exclaimed in her provincial dialect: 'Doun't be afeard Sir Willum, I'll not crack your joug.' I turned away disgusted" (Holland 1:243). The restraint imposed by silence seems to have obscured the underlying economic relations of the spectacle (Sir William probably *was* worrying about the safety of his Etruscan vase, and Hart remained dependent on his generosity) and to have licensed Hart's emotional extravagance: what could not be spoken in upper-class society (at least not in a lower-class accent) could be silently performed.

If in Hart's early career, restraint overbalanced social mobility, her Neapolitan Attitudes seemed to privilege mobility over restraint. Perhaps as a result, English responses to Hart and her Attitudes remained ambivalent at best. Two weeks before Hart's marriage to Sir William, for instance, Horace Walpole remarked "on Mrs. Hart, Sir W. Hamilton's pantomime mistress—or wife, who acts all the antique statues in an Indian shawl. I have not seen her yet, so am no judge, but people are mad about her wonderful expression, which I do not conceive, so few antique statues having any expression at all—nor being designed to have it" (11:337). Walpole's remark about the "Indian" shawl undercuts any claim to authenticity in this portrayal of antiquity—even the "wonderful expression" acclaimed by spectators seems out of place in a reproduction of Greek statues. Walpole captures the problem with Hart's public and private attitudes alike: almost always, she has a little too much expression for the role. Acclaimed for bringing antique statues to life, Emma was poorly suited to remaining stone: unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow.

What observers tended to celebrate in Hart's performances was her ability to transform herself and—as Goethe's account makes clear—to

shift rapidly from one portrayal, one passion, to the next. What observers deplored in Hart's person was her inability (or unwillingness) to transform herself into a proper representation of upper-class femininity in private life. As a result, spectators repeatedly distinguished between the identity of the performer and the success or beauty of the performance. The Comtesse de Boigne summarizes the reception of Hart's Attitudes in these terms:

She brought the statues of antiquity to life and without servile copying, recalled them to the poetic imaginations of the Italians by a sort of improvisation in action. Others have sought to imitate the talent of Lady Hamilton; I don't believe any have succeeded. . . . Outside of this instinct for the arts, nothing was more vulgar and common than Lady Hamilton. After she had shed the antique costume to wear ordinary clothes, she lost all distinction. (54)

Such conclusions were generally accepted. For Lady Elizabeth Foster, "Lord Bristol's remark seems to me so just a one that I must end with it: 'Take her as anything but Mrs. Hart and she is a superior being—as herself she is always vulgar'" (quoted in Stuart 202). Hart's lack of progress in refined manners suggests one boundary for her capacity for self-transformation. Throughout her days of glory, Emma Hamilton prided herself on remaining "humble" and "simple"—her heroic performances (both her Attitudes and her appearances on what she clearly saw as the stage of history) were roles she saw as somehow integral to her own character. Violently opposed to the French Revolution and republicanism more generally, she nonetheless shared with her ideological enemies a belief that heroism and high spirits recognize no class boundaries. And when she turned from performing domestic piety to performing politics, Hart's excesses took on a subversive violence similar to that of the Revolution itself.

Surprisingly, perhaps, Hart's pervasive vulgarity failed to halt her social climb. If Hart's upper-class audiences contrasted the superiority of her Attitudes with the vulgarity of her everyday persona, Sir William's letters to Greville emphasize Hart's domesticity as a counterpart to her social success. On 18 December 1787, Sir William wrote: "We are here as usual My Dear Charles and I am out almost every day on shooting parties but I find my house comfortable in the Evening with Emma's society" (Morrison 1:134–35). The comfort of his house remained a primary objective with Sir William, and he paid much more generously than his nephew had for Hart's work as housekeeper and hostess (Morrison 1:185). By the end of the year, Greville apparently had heard enough about the Hamilton household and their coming visit to England to war-

rant a letter of advice to Hart. She responded in January 1791, in terms more likely to alarm than to reassure him: "You need not be affraid for me in England. . . . I don't wish to attract notice. I wish to be an example of good conduct, and to show the world that a pretty woman is not allways a fool." The tone of the letter veers oddly between "properly feminine" submission ("I wish to be an example of good conduct") and an underlying delight in the revenge that was a long time coming ("a pretty woman is not allways a fool"). Greville apparently warned her against ambition and advised separate lodgings for their stay in England. She responded:

All my ambition is to make Sir William happy, & you will see he is so. As to our seperating houss, we can't do it, or why should we? You can't think 2 people, that has lived five years with all the domestic happiness that's possible, can separate, & those 2 persons, that knows no other comfort but in each other's comppany, which is the case I assure you with ous, tho' you bachelors don't understand it. . . . We will lett you into our plans and hearths. (Morrison 1:189)

Greville, a bachelor by choice, is invited to regret his decision five years earlier to part with a woman his elders and betters have begun to idealize. When Hart promises, "We will lett you into our plans and hearths," the (presumably unintentional) confusion of hearts and hearths is nonetheless telling. Passion and domesticity, hearts and hearths, seem to have been easily confused and with some difficulty resolved in the complementary affairs of Sir William and his nephew. Hart learned from Greville the powerful appeal of domesticity; she was slow to forget the lesson. Yet when Heneage Legge, a friend of both Greville and Hamilton, attempted to persuade her to remain Mrs. Hart, she simply refused to listen: "I have all along told her . . . she was a happier woman as Mrs. H. than she would be as Ly H., when, more reserved behaviour being necessary, she would be depriv'd of half her amusements, & must no longer sing those comic parts which tend so much to the entertainment of herself & her friends. She does not accede to that doctrine" (Morrison 1:190). A success in Neopolitan society even with her comic songs and rough manners, Hart refused to see why her present performance as the lady of Hamilton's house could not simply be legalized and legitimated. After five years of admiration in Naples, Emma Hart had developed an attitude.

### 3. THE PANTOMIME AMBASSADRESS

To commemorate the 1791 wedding of Emma Hart and Sir William Hamilton, Romney painted a portrait of Emma commonly known as *The*

*Ambassadress.* The title of the portrait captures some of the ambiguity of her new role: she was neither an official ambassador nor entirely without influence. Over the next few years we might imagine the persona of the ambassadress vying with that of the "pantomime mistress—or wife" for dominance. Yet the two roles remained less distinct than observers might have hoped. The real scandal of Emma, Lady Hamilton, lay not in her marriage to an English nobleman but in her subsequent career, her more informal striking of heroic attitudes and their influence over an English ambassador, a Neapolitan queen, and a British naval hero. Still, her political ascendancy developed slowly. As the Napoleonic wars moved ever closer to Naples and the royal family, Sir William's health became increasingly uncertain, and Hamilton's political role increased correspondingly. She nursed her husband in his various illnesses, helped him in his diplomatic correspondence, and acted as an informal conduit between the queen and the British ambassador—a role of some importance given the limited capacities of the king and the political dominance of the queen. Historians continue to dispute Emma's actual importance in Neapolitan politics of the period: Brian Fothergill, for instance, argues that she was no more than a go-between for the queen and the ambassador and that had Emma not filled this role, some other person would have. The same, of course, could be said of the ambassador himself: the potential for replacement or substitution does not undo the potential influence of Hamilton's mediation.

Reports of a lesbian relationship between Emma Hamilton and Maria Carolina, queen of Naples, have been dismissed by most of Lady Hamilton's biographers. These reports may have originated with Napoleon; at the very least, they were supported by him and others in Republican France. Yet whether or not a physical relationship existed between Emma Hamilton and the queen, the terms of their friendship were at times unmistakably romantic, recalling older traditions of courtly love. In 1795, Emma commanded Greville: "Send me some news, political and private; for, against my will, owing to my situation here, I am got into politicks, and I wish to have news for our dear much-loved Queen, whom I adore. Nor can I live without her, for she is to me a mother friend and everything" (Morrison 1:263). Playing the role of devoted cavalier, Emma sought to answer all of her lady's needs and desires. Her letters idealize the queen in courtly and unrealistic language: "If you cou'd know her as I do, how you wou'd adore her! For she is the first woman in the world; her talents are superior to every woman's in the world; and her heart is most excellent and strictly good and upright" (Morrison 1:263). Emma had long presented English ladies to the queen; at times, she seems to have done the same for diplomatic gentlemen. In February 1796, for instance, she wrote to Lord Macartney:



I have been with the Queen this morning, and she desires so much to see you that I have appointed to carry you to her this evening at half past seven. She will be alone, and you will see her in her family way. You will be in love with her, as I am. Sir William is to go with us; shall we call on you or will you drink tea with us?—let me know. . . . We will go to the opera to-morrow, but I would give up all operas for *my Queen of Hearts*. She expects you with impatience. (Morrison 1:275)

Assurance and idolatry vie for the upper hand in this note: as in the tradition of courtly love, Emma's service to the queen seems to have increased her status in the court more generally. At the same time, Emma's adoration models for Macartney the proper (masculine?) response to the queen: "You will be in love with her, as I am." For her part, the queen seems to have accepted the devotion of this female cavalier within the conventions of courtly love. During the year(s) of crisis in Naples, the queen's frequent letters to Emma, written in awkward French, occasionally cast "the ambassadress" in a masculine role. In April 1798, she wrote to Emma: "Vous en êtes le maître de mon coeur, ma chère milady, ni pour mes amis, comme vous, ni pour mes opinions ne change jamais" (quoted in Sichel 199). And in June 1798, Maria Carolina proclaimed Emma "mon ministre plénipotentier" (quoted in Sichel 142).

The "ambassadress" made use of these plenipotentiary powers in the interests of the British navy. Earlier that year, the young Commodore Nelson, wanting to engage Napoleon off the coast of Alexandria, had told the king, the queen, and the Hamiltons he needed assurance that he would be able to water and provision his ships at need along the coast of Naples and Sicily. Hamilton appears to have been influential in obtaining this assurance. John Mitford, a retired navy man, later summarized the popular mythology surrounding this affair:

It is a well-confirmed fact, that French influence operated so powerfully at the Court of Naples, that *Ferdinand* had written to the Governor of Syracuse to withhold all supplies from Nelson's ship, and compel him to leave that port. The *Queen*, at Lady Hamilton's instigation, took the dispatches from the *King's* pocket, opened them, inserting directions for supplies to be granted; and resealing them, deposited them again from whence they were taken. The *sagacious* monarch sent them off next *morning*. The fleet was promptly supplied with provisions, without which they could not have gone to Egypt, and the enemy's fleet would have escaped destruction. . . . The dotage of Sir William Hamilton prevented him from being an efficient agent for the interests of his country; but the distinguished talent and unwearied zeal of his consort made ample

amends for all his mental imbecilities. England never was better represented at a foreign Court than by this *Female Ambassador*.  
(264 n.)

This account was much disputed and the truth presumably far more pedestrian—but Nelson and to a lesser extent Sir William consistently supported Hamilton's claim to have influenced the queen decisively in this affair. Indeed, the emperor of Russia, acting on Nelson's advice, eventually awarded Emma Hamilton the title of "Chanoiness of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem" for this intervention in the war, thus formally acknowledging her role as courtly cavalier. Captain Ball, made a commander of the same order for his heroism in battle, subsequently addressed her as "her Excellency la Chevalière Hamilton" (Morrison 2:478).

Nelson's subsequent defeat of the French fleet off the coast of Egypt seemed the first turning point of the war. News of his victory in the "Battle of the Nile" reached Naples in September 1798. On hearing of the victory—and of Nelson's loss of an arm and an eye—Hamilton fell to the ground in a faint, bruising herself badly. Next she draped herself, not in a shawl but in Nelson himself. She wrote the "Hero of the Nile" to tell him: "My dress from head to foot is alla Nelson. Ask Hoste. Even my shawl is in Blue with gold anchors all over. My earrings are Nelson's anchors; in short, we are be-Nelsoned all over. I send you some sonets, but I must have taken a ship on purpose to send you all written on you" (quoted in Sichel 491). Hamilton responded to Nelson's victory by quite literally taking it on herself, dressing herself not only "alla Nelson" but also as Nelson, or in Nelson. Hamilton next received Nelson's performance as if it were a production of her own "Attitudes." Renowned for bringing statues to life, she visualized her hero preserved in a statue of gold: "What a day will it be to England when the glorious news arrives! Glad shou'd I be to be there for one moment. Your statue ought to be made of pure gold and placed in the middle of London" (quoted in Sichel 499). Hamilton's hyperbole at once objectifies and idealizes Nelson: "If I was King of England I wou'd make you the most noble present, Duke Nelson, Marquis Nile, Earl Aboukir, Vicount Pyramid, Baron Crocodile, and Prince Victory, that posterity might have you in all forms" (quoted in Sichel 496). Even as these imagined honors memorialize and thus to some extent fix the form of victory, the multiplicity of forms imagined reproduces the kind of metamorphosis associated with Emma Hamilton's own Attitudes. In her letters to Nelson, Hamilton subsumes heroic masculinity within her own feminine performance of excess.

Hamilton's informal performances of Nelsonian attitudes blurred the line between public stage and private identity, between spectacle and



spectator, producing an indeterminacy of identity and a mobility of position that might seem either threatening or exhilarating. In relation both to Nelson and to the queen of Naples, Hamilton largely erased the distinction between actor and spectator by taking on and modeling the role of sympathetic audience for each: admiring Nelson, she also imitated his rhetoric and attitudes before the queen; loving the queen, she modeled for Nelson the appropriately chivalric response to royalty in distress. After this first great victory, her letters to Nelson show Hamilton involving the queen in a contagious celebration of Nelson's virtues: "The Queen yesterday said to me, the more I think on it, the greater I find it [the battle], and I feil such gratitude to the warrior, the glorious Nelson, that my respect is such that I cou'd fall at his honner'd feet and kiss them" (quoted in Sichel 499). The hyperbole of this declaration at first seems more like Emma than the queen, but the ambassadress goes on to explain: "You that know us booth, and how alike we are in many things, that is, I as Emma Hamilton, and she as Queen of Naples—imagine us booth speaking of you. We touch ourselves into terms of rapture, respect, and admiration, and conclude their is not such another in the world" (quoted in Sichel 499). Here, the queen and her female cavalier appear equally accountable for the fervent response, mutually "touching" themselves into terms of rapture. At other moments, however, Hamilton clearly worked to "touch" the queen more unilaterally; she seems to have done so by playing Nelson, this time taking on not his victory but his mannerisms, rhetoric, and body language. In October 1798, for instance, Hamilton worked to persuade the queen to send a Neapolitan army against the republican forces in Rome. She wrote to Nelson:

I flatter myself WE SPUR them on, for I am allways with the queen and I hold out your energick language to her. . . . [W]hile the passions of the queen were up and agitated, I got up, put out my left arm, like you, spoke the language of truth to her, . . . that she was sure to be lost if they were inactive, and their was a chance of being saved if they made use of the day and struck now while all minds are imprest with the Horrers their neighbours are suffering from these Robbers. In short there was a Council, and it was determined to march out and help themselves. (Add. MS. 34.989; quoted in Sichel 8–9)

Here, the "language of truth" and the physical recollection of heroism—Emma puts out, like Nelson, her left arm, for the hero of the Nile had lost his right arm in winning the battle—translate performance into policy.

Yet Hamilton's performance of Nelson's attitudes for the queen led to bloody consequences that damaged the reputations of almost all involved. By December 1798, Republican armies were marching on

Naples; Nelson and the Hamiltons helped develop plans for a royal escape to Sicily. These plans—which included secret passageways, midnight flight, secreted jewels—were carried out in early January. The members of the royal family were conducted safely to Nelson's ship, only to find themselves in the midst of a horrific storm. Hamilton, one of the few good sailors in the group of civilians, nursed the others through violent bouts of seasickness; yet despite her efforts, the six-year-old Prince Albert died in her arms. Though Hamilton's next letter to Greville reiterated her devotion to "my dear, adorable queen, whom I love better *than any person in the world*" (Morrison 2:370), the royal flight resulted in the loss of most of Maria Carolina's power: Ferdinand, mistrusting his queen, took the government of Naples and Sicily back into his own hands, while the queen and Lady Hamilton apparently turned to gambling in the notoriously decadent city of Palermo. By November 1799, old acquaintances writing to ask for news found it necessary to state explicitly, "we still retain the same friendly sentiments" (Morrison 2:435).

When the fortunes of war began to turn, and the Royalist army seemed capable of retaking Naples, Nelson sailed to support the effort from the sea. Emma and Sir William accompanied Nelson as envois respectively of the queen and king. What resulted was a scene of legendary carnage: bodies and body parts piled high on street corners. When Admiral Caracciola, who had fired on his own flagship as he abandoned the Royalists to join the Republican forces, fell into Nelson's hands, he was given a summary naval trial and (with dubious legality) hung from the yardarm of that same flagship. His body was left to hang, visible from the shore from 5:00 P.M. until sunset, before it was cut down and thrown unceremoniously into the sea; weeks later, the body ominously resurfaced. A garrison that surrendered to Nelson was similarly massacred under questionable circumstances. The king, arriving intent on vengeance, soon had traitors and Jacobins slaughtered wholesale. Emma's presence on this scene was scandalously unfeminine, suggestive of blood-thirst and a monstrous character. Her more sympathetic biographers work especially hard to show that Emma's role (and that of the queen) was properly feminine—that of pleading for mercy and trying to slow the slaughter. At the same time, however, Emma continued to act as the queen's cavalier, persuading Nelson to arm the Lazzaroni, the artisan-peasants of Naples, in order to form a "queen's party" and work against Maria Carolina's unfavorable image. By the beginning of August, Emma felt entitled to inform Greville:

We return with a kingdom to present to my much-loved Queen. I have allso been so happy to succeed in all my campanes, and everything I was charged with. . . . There is great preparations for our

return. The Queen comes out with all Palermo to meet us. A landing-place is made,—balls, suppers, illuminations, all ready. The Queen has prepared my cloathes—in short, if I have fag'd, I am more than repaid. I tell you this, that you may see I am not unworthy of having been once in some degree your *élève*. (Morrison 2:417)

Hamilton means to suggest she has surpassed her master—yet her return to Palermo remained almost as scandalous as her apparent participation in the royalist slaughter. No longer willing to remain a passive object of speculation, she had developed a great fondness for the abstractions of gaming. Her fondness for play, for Nelson, and for the queen—all drew harsh comments, as did her apparent inability to distinguish between “play” and tragedy. An object of others’ speculation, Hart had embodied domesticity; speculating in her own right, that Hamilton woman became a figure of monstrosity, both for her gambling and for her participation in slaughter. One of her naval favorites, Troubridge, finally wrote to warn her against gambling and her progressive loss of reputation; she acknowledged the advice and promised to play no more (Morrison 2:441). Yet by the time Nelson and the Hamiltons left Palermo, accompanying the queen on her way to Austria and then continuing overland for England, the damage to Hamilton’s reputation was irreparable. Returning to England, she would pay for her hubris—both through the tragedy of Nelson’s death and through the farce and caricatures that pilloried her during his lifetime and beyond.

#### 4. UPSTAGING ROMANCE

Emma Hamilton’s Attitudes, her allegorical modeling for Romney and others, and her political engagement—all were attuned to the conventions of heroic romance. But in returning to England, Hamilton lost control over the representation of her actions—her return inaugurated a generic shift in her career from the conventions of romance to those of farce. Caricatures by Isaac Cruikshank, Thomas Rowlandson, and James Gillray worked to reestablish the social divisions threatened by the Hamilton-Nelson ménage by separating the trio into a more acceptable though still scandalous sexual configuration of one couple plus the odd man out. They also worked to separate Nelson’s self-consciously heroic performances in battle from his self-dramatizing affair with Emma Hamilton. In other words, the caricatures participated to some degree in the impossible task of creating a model of national patriotism purged of vulgarity.

They did so with varying degrees of success. Cruikshank’s *A Mansion House Treat: or Smoking Attitudes!*, printed 18 November 1800 (just

seven days after the trio returned to England), managed only to pillory the adulterous lovers for their sexual and social transgressions. The print displays Hamilton smoking like a man, along with Sir William, Nelson, Pitt, and others; the dialogue included in the print offers little more than a crude witticism:

*Emma*: "Pho the old man's pipes allways out, but yours burns with full Vigour."

*Nelson*: "Yes Yes I'll give you such a smoke. I'll pour a whole broadside into you."

Rowlandson's *Lady Hxxxxxxx's Attitudes*, also produced in November 1800, succeeded in separating Nelson and Hamilton—but only by looking back in time to Hamilton's early, disreputable career (fig. 7). The print features a woman modeling nude for a young painter while an elderly, bespectacled connoisseur peeps from behind a curtain. The two men are linked by their interest in the woman's belly and the glass (monocle and spectacle, respectively) through which they survey her. The print traces a crude and somewhat questionable sublimation of sex into art: in the left front of the picture are two heads, Jupiter and a nymph kissing; back behind the artist on the right stands the statue of a nymph and a satyr embracing. The posture of Hamilton's upper body seems to echo that of the nymph: the model holds a bearded black satyr mask in roughly the same way as the nymph reaches up to touch her satyr's head. The *satyr* has been removed from the scene—the female model stands alone—but the *satire* on two men obsessed with a common woman's sexuality remains. Yet Rowlandson, in leaving Nelson out of this scene, also revised the context, the kind of voyeurism Emma in her younger days endlessly inspired. The spectacle she presented most successfully to a mingled company of artists and voyeurs was not nudity and sex but rather an oscillation between domesticity and extravagance. Her later performances—both public and private—focused on questions of grandeur, heroism, and tragedy, while maintaining the vulgar excesses that marked her class origins. Reducing Hamilton's *Attitudes* and influence to sexual exhibitionism and manipulation, this print redomesticates the threat Hamilton posed by reinserting her into a world once again balanced between allegorical speculation and domestic restraint.

Gillray's first caricature on the Hamilton-Nelson ménage, published on 6 February 1801, tackles the problem of patriotic heroism more directly (fig. 8). The print features Hamilton as *Dido in Despair* and attributes to this modern Dido the following lines:

Ah where & ah where is my gallant Sailor gone?  
He's gone to fight the Frenchmen, for George upon the throne,



FIG. 7. Thomas Rowlandson, "Lady Hxxxxxxx's Attitudes." November 1800. © British Museum (BM Sat 9571).





FIG. 8. James Gillray, "Dido in Despair." February 6, 1801. © British Museum (BM Sat 9572).

He's gone to fight ye Frenchmen, t'loose t'other Arm & Eye,  
And left me with the old Antiques, to lay me down & Cry.

The antiques most immediately visible are those scattered on the floor in the bottom right corner of the scene, below Emma's dressing table—but there is another “antique” lying in the bed beside (or behind) her. Sir William's presence is overshadowed by Hamilton's histrionics, as his scandalously sexual antiquities remain a step below Hamilton's foreign makeup (“rouge à la Naples”) and liqueur (“Maraschino”). Nelson appears only in the fleet seen through the open window on the left, sailing away. On the window seat—a liminal space that both separates and links Nelson and Hamilton—rests one of Hamilton's shawls, along with a book entitled *Studies of Academic Attitudes taken from the Life*. Recalling Rowlandson's print, this open book features a reclining female nude with draperies above and below her—but none actually on her body. By far the most striking feature of this caricature, however, is Hamilton's ludicrous size. Her obesity, along with the vulgarity of her verses and the ubiquitous, rather tawdry insistence on sex, turns the whole affair into tasteless mock heroics. Gillray uses Hamilton's obesity to rewrite romance by re-presenting her vulgarity in bodily form. Hamilton's physical condition at the time suggests a slightly different revision of romance: on 18 January 1801, she had given birth to the child eventually named Horatia Nelson: the child was promptly put out to nurse, and Emma Hamilton presented as godmother rather than biological mother.

Obscene and obese mock heroics—or illicit reproduction on an ideological as well as a biological level? *Dido in Despair* focuses the critical energies of caricature upon the self-dramatizing figure of “Dido” but refrains from a parody of the absent Aeneas. Indeed, the caricature as a whole works to separate “arms and the man” from the femme fatale who might be viewed as a threat to the nation's glorious destiny. Nevertheless, Nelson's own heroic persona remained indistinguishable from the kind of self-dramatization this caricature attributes strictly to Hamilton. Linda Colley has argued that Nelson's

calculated exhibitionism, this theatre, . . . embarrassed and appalled many of his more genuinely patrician contemporaries. For it seemed to caricature to a vulgar degree the very style and strategy that they themselves were increasingly adopting. Splendidly, unabashedly and utterly successfully, Nelson did what the majority of the men who dominated Great Britain sought to do more elegantly and discreetly: use patriotic display to impress the public and cement their own authority. (Colley 183)



What embarrassed the patricians in Nelson, that element of unconscious and unintentional parody, could be displaced onto Emma Hamilton through the carefully designed caricatures of Gillray and others. But not even Hamilton could be ridiculed wholeheartedly: some of the posturing, the attitudes shared by Nelson and Hamilton, must have seemed necessary to maintain the illusions and the new mythology of patriotic fervor.

Gillray's second caricature on the Nelson-Hamilton imbroglio, published on 11 February 1801, records some of the public ambivalence this produced (fig. 9). Entitled *A Cognoscenti Contemplating ye Beauties of ye Antique*, the caricature features Sir William rather than Hamilton at its center: on the wall above and behind the ambassador is a picture of his beloved Vesuvius erupting. As in the previous print, Sir William seems to rule the right-hand side of the caricature: he figures there both as the portrait of Claudius (the Roman emperor known, like Sir William, in part for his enjoyment of food) and as the grotesque statue entitled *Midas* immediately below that painting. The portrait's frame is topped with a pair of horns that registers Sir William's status as cuckold even as those horns might recall his frequent hunting parties with the king of Naples. Sir William is thus portrayed as the cuckolded husband who nonetheless continues, in the role of Midas, to hold the purse strings. To the Claudius of Sir William, however, Nelson plays Mark Antony, while Hamilton is, inevitably, Cleopatra. The portraits of Antony and Cleopatra are grouped together to the left of the volcano—again, Gillray seems to resist on a visual level the intermingling suggested by this scandalous ménage à trois. Nelson/Antony is quite a handsome figure in full naval regalia; on the other hand, Cleopatra's breasts are exposed, and she holds a bottle labeled "Gin" in her right hand. Like the figure of Dido in the first caricature, Gillray's use of Antony and Cleopatra is clearly mock-heroic. Yet in this mythic recasting of the Hamilton-Nelson affair, Nelson appears almost as vulnerable as Hamilton. As Antony abandoned his flotilla in the midst of a sea battle to fly to Cleopatra's side, so Nelson was thought to have shirked his duties in order to remain with Hamilton in Naples and Sicily. Yet Antony and Cleopatra remain in cultural memory as legendary lovers, beyond any simplistic apportioning of blame. Gillray's caricature captures some of the ambivalence with which Hamilton's capacity for self-transformation was received—and the extent to which Nelson's own performance of heroic patriotism could be seen as tainted by the sensual temptations of the modern Cleopatra.

The most poignant element of this caricature, however, remains the confrontation between Sir William and the disfigured bust of an "antique beauty." The figure, boasting thick dark hair and large, wide-set eyes, seems an image of the young Emma Hamilton. Indeed, with the pearls



FIG. 9. James Gillray, "A Cognoscenti contemplating ye Beauties of ye Antique." February 11, 1801. © British Museum (BM Sat 9753).

around her throat and in her hair, this bust is strikingly similar to a portrait of Hamilton by Madame Vigée-Le Brun that Sir William sold to raise cash in 1801. Nelson, furious with Sir William, wrote to Hamilton, "I see clearly, my dearest friend, you are on SALE" (Morrison 2:128)—by July 1802, he had purchased the portrait himself. Sir William had a miniature copy of the portrait made and willed it to Nelson with the words: "The copy of Madame le Brun's picture of Emma, in enamel, by Bone, I give to my dearest friend Lord Nelson, Duke of Bronte; a very small token of the great regard I have for his Lordship, the most virtuous, loyal, and truly brave character I ever met with. God bless him, and shame fall on those who do not say 'Amen'" (Morrison 2:424). The aggressiveness of this closing remark suggests some of the impact of Gillray's caricature. Here, the bust is disfigured, its nose and mouth broken off, perhaps in reference to Hamilton's adultery: in the seventeenth century, rakes would cut the noses of women accused of adultery (Barker-Benfield). Sir William, hunched, gaunt, and hollow eyed, peers intently at the bust, which, despite its disfigurement, seems younger and livelier than he. The cognoscenti holds up to his eyes a pair of spectacles, as if to see more clearly, but he holds them up backward. This reversal may be designed to suggest that Sir William now sees less clearly than ever, but it could also be read in terms of an uneasy reciprocity: Sir William trying to see things as if from Hamilton's perspective—or asking her to look at him more closely. Recalling yet again the indeterminacy of spectacle and spectator created by Hamilton's Neapolitan Attitudes, I think the glasses could also be read as a visual pun: spectacles dominate the only relationship between Sir William and his wife the caricaturist is able to envision. Yet the print also disavows Hamilton's intense physical appeal: the romance heroine appears in this print not in the flesh but only as a damaged statue and a damaging portrait. Gillray's caricature immobilizes Hamilton's shifting performance of romance in a monument to flawed and broken beauty.

Together, Cruikshank, Rowlandson, and Gillray all suggest that in eschewing domestic restraint, Hamilton opened herself up to the social, sexual, and financial speculation of the men around her. While this may be a fair reading of her career, the prints also present a forced choice between two fixed alternatives, suggesting that Hamilton abandoned the role of domestic subject for that of sexual object—and that no other roles exist. Focusing on Hamilton's body, the caricatures either ignore or parody the importance of "attitude" in her career—and in the careers of the influential men and women whose lives and power she shared. In particular, contemporary caricatures repeatedly focused on Emma Hamilton's sexual exhibitionism in an attempt to limit the charges of political exhi-

bitionism made against Nelson's heroic reputation: Hamilton's body could be used to exclude both her own and her lover's excesses from Nelson's claims to heroism. Greville once remarked of Hamilton that "anything grand, masculine or feminine, she could take up, & if she took up the part of Scaevola, she would be as much offended if she was told she was a woman as she would be, if she assumed Lucretia, she was told she was masculine" (Morrison 1:156). Contemporary caricatures and social criticism alike worked vigorously to reapply the limits of gender and class to this enormously appealing but dangerously ungrounded model of heroism as theatrical performance.

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